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ABSTRACT

Twelve recent developments concerning i.t.a. were discussed. They include the following: the recent publication of reports about i.t.a.; the debate in the House of Commons on the Schools Council Report and the distribution of copies of the Hansard reprint of the debate; sizable new financial aid; new members joining the i.t.a. Foundation; recent developments in materials and in the preparation of teachers; the recent adoption of "Speech i.t.a." by the government of Gambia in West Africa; and related developments in the United States concerning i.t.a. (CL)

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TWELVE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN BRITAIN ABOUT THE ACCEPTANCE AND USE OF i.t.a.

Friday, May 8th, 1970, 2.15 p.m.

The spread of the Initial Teaching Alphabet (i.t.a.) in England and Wales (excluding, for the moment and this purpose, Scotland and Northern Ireland) has been a spectacular and in itself convincing testimony of the acceptability, indeed the compulsion in the enthusiasm with which teachers have been persuaded to try i.t.a. and have stayed with it after trial.(1)

1.

The publication in October last of the long-awaited report by the late Professor Frank Warburton and Vera Southgate(2) is already leading to a widespread reduction in the "resistance to change (which) lies in a rotted unwillingness to consider evidence" - to which I will refer later, and to a rapid expansion in the number of schools using i.t.a. Not only has the stock cautionary excuse for inaction - "We must await the Schools Council's verdict" - been removed, but overwhelmingly convincing evidence has been provided which in effect obligates everyone connected with the teaching

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of language and of literacy to learners of whatever age - to study the evidence, to accept the conclusions, and to infer the consequences, in terms of action, which are appropriate to each given situation.

The sense of the report is best conveyed by the unequivocal sentence on pp. 234/5:-

> "There is no evidence whatsoever for the belief that the best way to learn to read in traditional orthography is to learn to read in traditional orthography. It would appear rather that the best way to learn to read in traditional orthography is to learn to read in the initial teaching alphabet."

2.

The second most significant development has been the publication last December of a joint press statement[3] by London University Institute of Education and our National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales.

The passages in italics in the footnote are mine. Those words and the conclusions that i.t.a. "has substantial advantages over traditional orthography in the early stages of teaching children to read" are the particular words which are now having a noticeable effect in the greatly enlivened interest in i.t.a. This emphasis on "the welfare of countless children - especially those who now have difficulties" by the only national research body in Britain, jointly with the University of London's Institute of Education - which is the leading one in Britain (and greatly respected here in America) - has already had a profound effect upon not only the high-ups in education in Britain, but also upon others, particularly the Head teachers (Principals) on whom constitutionally lies the duty to study the evidence and recognize how important to children will be their decision; also upon the class teachers who work so closely in association with the Principals.

3.

The third development, also in December, was the debate in the House of Commons on the Schools Council Report, and the Hansard (the Official Report) of the debate, including the Minister's reply that the Department of Education and Science intended to conduct short courses; and expected Local Education Authorities to "organize conferences and discussions about the initial teaching alphabet in teachers' groups and centers", and that the alphabet would feature in in-service training for teachers which will be provided by Authorities, Institutes and Colleges of Education.

4.

As a fourth development, 59% of the Heads of the Local Education Authorities in England and Wales have asked for and distributed over 15,000 copies of the Hansard reprint of the debate in the House of Commons mentioned above. A single copy was sent to all the Chief Education Officers and Directors of Education in Britain, (they correspond to your "Superintendents") with the offer to supply copies in bulk for members of their Committee, officials and head teachers (your "Principals") and teachers of their infant and junior schools. A response from 60% of them for 15,000 copies was most encouraging.

The developments covered under tht above four headings may be regarded as a veritable swarm of swallows forecasting the summers of that even more rapid growth which is expected. Together they have set the scene for activities by the i.t.a. Foundation as follows:-

5.

The i.t.a. Foundation had needed to be relatively quiescent during the period whilst the Schools Council Report was awaited. Fortunately the

return to activity has been further stimulated by an access of financial support. Last November the Foundation, which is a tax-exempt (non-profit) "Corporation" (and in Britain "Company") heard of a legacy expected to amount to a capital sum between six and seven million dollars.

Finance is indeed very important. It will have been evident that even the inception in 1961 with only 20 schools, and the subsequent spread, would not have occurred or have been even conceivable without a force of some sort urging such a revolutionary innovation and suggesting first research - and now implementation of the findings. Such a force moreover needed to be able to provide or call on finance. Thus clearly the legacy, as the testator so practically intended, will become the means of advancing even earlier the day when it will come to be recognized by teachers and educators generally that the use of a 2,000-year-old alphabet, and of spellings with it, chosen 600 years ago, has been a handicap now happily past, and onemo longer destined to hold back children <u>in their first learning</u> of language and literacy.

6.

This good news of new finance coincided with a sixth development. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education and the Secretary of our National Union of Teachers having retired, all three of them have joined the Council of the i.t.a. Foundation because in their work they had been so impressed with what i.t.a. has to offer, and with the need of schools to profit from it as soon as possible. Mr. John Blackie C.B. was until recently Her Majesty's <u>Chief</u> Inspector: Mr. Donald Sadler was a Divisional Inspector who had seen a very great growth of i.t.a. in his Division and had been thrilled by what he had observed: Sir Ronald Gould, M.A., LL.D. was, until

a few weeks ago, the Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, and is still a world figure in Education. But these three have joined the Council not just as figureheads. They have joined in order to accelerate the super-session of T.O. and the substitution of i.t.a. as the initial medium for teaching language and literacy. These three, together with the Right Hon. Patrick Gordon Walker, one-time Secretary of State for Education and Science, and Mr. Maurice Harrison, one-time Director of Education in the city which first became 100% i.t.a., are a formidable team for visiting those in authority at the 233 Local Authorities of England and Wales, the 35 in Scotland, and the 9 in Northern Ireland.

7.

In the last few days has been yet another accession of top-level acceptance of the need to supersede quickly the use of our traditional orthography (T.O.) by a more helpful learning medium. Dr. William Wall, B.A., Ph.D., the Dean of London University Institute of Education, has also joined the Council. His advent is particularly pleasing as well as helpful, seeing that he - like Sir Ronald Gould - was one of those who had joined with me in 1959 in seeking to mount the research into the value of i.t.a. as a much better initial teaching medium - one which, if so, ought to supersede T.O.

Equally strengthening has been the accession to the Council of Mr. Alex Evans, at present Secretary (retiring in September) of the Association of Teachers in Colleges and Departments of Education: and of Miss Priscilla Steele, M.Ed., at present Principal of Darlington College of Education, becoming in September Principal of the Froebel Institute College of Education.

8.

The preparation of teachers so that they may begin to teach with i.t.a. in place of T.O. and may feel equally secure in teaching with the new medium, is most important.

We have been fortunate in Britain in that the spread of i.t.a. has been so wide that the staffing is assured for the many "Seminar Workshops" which are beginning to be demanded, and which, thanks to these recent encouragements, will be demanded in greater quantity as the six of us complete our interviews with those in authority.

Thus as an eighth development there are the beginnings of action by our Local Education Authorities, our Institutes and Departments of Education, and our Colleges of Education - action which our Minister says that he is "expecting" in order to achieve the desired in-service and pre-service "workshopping" of teachers and students. Before this can happen, however, many of those particularly in the Universities and Colleges of Education will need to drop that "deep-rooted unwillingness to consider evidence" and to adopt a positive attitude and collaborative actions.

Mr. John Blackie and I have already begun a series of interviews with those in the appropriate departments in the 22 Universities in England and Wales which are responsible for not only the pre-service training of students, but also the in-service training of teachers. These departments of the Universities are called "Area Training Organizations" (A.T.O.s) and are attached to the University of their areas in order to serve the Local Authorities and the Colleges of Education in that area. Their function is to run courses, lectures, and in this case i.t.a. workships.

The response from London University's A.T.O. was most encouraging - which was what was to be expected in view of that joint press statement

quoted in the second development. So too has been the help unofficially given to Mr. Blackie and me by those officials in the Department of Education and Science who have a special interest in teacher training. As will be seen, the task is a formidable one - the provision of workshops for, at a conservative estimate, say 700 lecturers or more in Colleges of Education, say 38,000 students (every year), and say 150,000 in-service teachers.

9.

Formidable or not, with the Minister and the nation willing the end, it becomes necessary to will also the means. Workshops, correspondences courses, books on the teaching of i.t.a., become more and more numerous. With the number and spread of experienced i.t.a. teachers, with film and with Ampex for closed-circuit television, and with our television networks, the task does not seem outside the potentialities of our nation.

The extent to which materials specifically manufactured for teaching in i.t.a. rather than in T.O. have come forward in the past, and have come particularly in the present year, in many forms - from books, typewriters and teaching apparatus to film, tapes and soft-ware for teaching machines - is well exemplified by the fact that there are now well over 2,000 different units, with considerable additions every month. At the outset no publisher was willing at his own expense to print, publish or supply anything in such an innovative medium - intended (hopefully) for sale to as yet only 20 schools in the whole world.

No doubt publishers have since then been encouraged to invest in i.t.a. also by the fact that from the outset, the use of i.t.a. was made free of copyright to all of them - provided the use conformed to the standard in both characters and spellings - and by the further fact that publishers (and incidentally the School Board, the teacher, the parent and child) would by

this condition be protected from the danger of the chaos of a multitude of competing initial teaching alphabets and spellings.

Since that first year (1961), in a happy contrast, more and more providers of materials have been reading the writing on the wall and have been providing an ever-increasing variety and choice. This "free behaviour" assessment of the future general acceptance of i.t.a. and of the abandonment of T.O. has been as convincing evidence of the ascertained merit of i.t.a. as has been the continual and persistent increase every year in the number of schools and teachers changing over from T.O. - all with the greatest enthusiasm, and all urging a wider acceptance based upon the proselytizing example and precept of Principals, teachers and others, who had studied the evidence and had had the courage and enterprise to confirm it by their own experience.

The decision by the Government of the Gambia in West Africa to introduce i.t.a. for the teaching of oracy and literacy in the elementary schools of the nation was made partly at the instance of the British Government, and was moreover undertaken with the assistance of the British council.

One-third of the schools went over to the use of i.t.a. last September, one-third will follow this September, and the final third next year. The medium used is "Speech i.t.a." - a modification of i.t.a. which does not alter the characters or spellings of i.t.a., but nevertheless gives to the reader that further information as to rhythm, stress and change in vowels which is needed in the teaching of speech and of listening to those who are ignorant of the English language in any of its forms - information which is not needed by those who are already skilled in speaking the language.

A learning medium in which the senses of hearing and of seeing (together with the sense of touch in the kinaesthetic actions of speaking and writing) are all in a mutually supportive relationship rather than a conflicting one, is perhaps more valuable for learning a new language in all its forms even than for learning one of the forms of a language (literacy) by someone who already practises one of the forms (oracy). There is considerable interest in Speech i.t.a. for teaching English, and there are many developments in countries other than the Gambia and continents other than Africa. It may confidently be expected that with this interest, and with the active support of the British Government and the British Council, there will begin an expansion in the use of i.t.a. for language teaching comparable to that which we have seen since 1961[(6)] in teaching reading and writing to those who already know English in its oral form.

11.

I gave evidence on i.t.a. at their request to your General Sub-Committee on Education at your House of Representatives.[(7)] This is a development in the U.S.A. rather than in Britain, but it closely coincided with a parallel development in Britain.

12.

No doubt this invitation to visit Capitol Hill played a part - if not an important part - in the later invitation I received to give evidence to the Sub-Committee on Education and Science of the House of Commons.[(8)]

I believe that that statement of evidence will be of very relevant interest to you as the citadel of the "Reading Establishment".

Incidentally it was very noticeable, but to me not surprising, how similar were the attitude of Congress and of the House of Commons to the cost efficiency of dollars and pounds spent on research, and to the

apparent lack of implementation in response to research findings. Thus you will find in the reprints of both testimonies some, I hope pertinent, suggestions and views in respect to innovation and the problem of harvesting the fruits of research as down-to-earth practical progress in classroom results.

It looks to me that this new approach, on both sides of the Atlantic, to the voting of money for educational research and innovation is most important and timely. I suggest that we are entering an era when those of us who purport to advise the Superintendent, the Principal and the classroom teacher (and for that matter those who publish the books we write in order that those ideas may best be carried out) will be required to be accountable and more aware of the product out-turned; and any of us who read Commissioner James Allen's paper at Los Angeles to the 1969 Annual Convention of the National Association of State Boards of Education - "The Right to Read - Target for the 70's", and who have taken note of the activities in that respect not only of your President but of Mrs. Nixon, will need to think hard about the sorry tale of that approximately 45% of all those in any age group in both our nations who finish school or drop out with a reading competence as low as Grad IV, and a language competence which we have never yet thought fit to consider, much less to have defined and measured.

I am confident that the imaginative and courageous lead given by your Commissioner, Dr. James Allen, is a practical one, and one which will be realized. This can be so - but only if those responsible for the teaching of children during the first six to twelve months of their schooling, in the words of the joint press statement mentioned in Note No. 3, "examine the evidence and recognize that on what they decide depends the welfare of countless children - especially those who now have difficulties."

Two decisions are required, and both are very practical. The first is to supersede a medium which has a sorry record of 600 years of only partial success, and the second is to recognize the linguistic inadequacy of so many children when they first come to school, and the need for special techniques which are required when language itself cannot be used in the normal teaching prodecures, because those to whom the teacher or the loud-speaker are talking are unable sufficiently to understand what has been said.

The foundation for the first decision is now evident and secure. It is set out in a nutshell on pp. 234/5 of "i.t.a. An Independent Evaluation"(2) which I have quoted above:-

> "There is no evidence whatsoever for the belief that the best way to learn to read in traditional orthography is to learn to read in traditional orthography. It would appear rather that the best way to learn to read in traditional orthography is to learn to read in the initial teaching alphabet."

The foundation for the second decision is possibly not as yet so well proven, but will nevertheless be more acceptable as well as evident and secure, seeing how generally reading failure and ;linguistic inadequacy go hand in hand.

The lead of America in this Right to Read - Target for the 70's will certainly have a profound effect in Britain, and throughout the whole English-speaking world. Indeed, already the Province of Alberta - as your Dr. Ethel King well knows - has taken up the challenge with its own courageous commitment to helping "especially those who now have difficulties", and I am sanguine that in your Province, Dr. King, as in many other parts of the English-speaking world, the future is a rosy one for i.t.a. and for little children. The evidence will be studied, both decisions will be taken,

and a courageous break will be generally made from past pre-conceptions and practices - to the very great benefit of the English-speaking child.

N O T E S

(1) The only certificated figures refer to June 1966, when there were 1554 infant schools, 459 junior and secondary schools, and 95 other schools using i.t.a., totalling 2108. At that time "Onlyta negligible number of schools had returned to the use of traditional orthography (T.O.) after using i.t.a., for reasons other than administrative ones." ("i.t.a.: An Independent Evaluation").(2) As of June 1969 a figure twice that magnitude (approaching 20% of the shcools) would seem to be a reliable estimate.

(2) "i.t.a.: An Independent Evaluation" - 'The report of a study carried out for the Schools Council on the use of the Initial Teaching Alphabet as a medium for beginning reading with infants.' (by Professor F.W. Warburton and Vera Southgate. Published by John Murray/W. & R. Chambers, London; Initial Teaching Alphabet Publications, Inc., New York. 1969)

(3) "In October 1960, The University of London Institute of Education and the National Foundation for Educational Research jointly sponsored a major series of researches into the efficacy of i.t.a. as a teaching medium.

"From the work don3 by the Reading Research Unit set up in the University of London Institute of Education, and from the evaluations of that and other work reported in "The i.t.a. Symposium"(4) and "i.t.a.: An Independent Evaluation"(2) two findings clearly emerge. Teh first is that the medium has substantial advantages over traditional orthography in the early stages of teaching children to read. The second is that attention has been drawn to the great need for exploring further through research and experiment the critical two or three years in which children are taught reading.

"Beyond this, however, lies another problem which concerns the role of research in determining policy. Some at least of the resistance to change lies in a rooted unwillingness to consider evidence. Few other areas of educational method have been as well and thoroughly explored as this. We would therefore urge teachers and others responsible for the important decision as to how and by what means reading should be taught, to examine the evidence and to recognize that on what they decide depends the welfare of countless children - especially those who now have difficulties."

(4) "The i.t.a. Symposium": 'Research Report on the British Experiment with i.t.a." (by John Downing. Published by National Foundation for Educational Research, The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Bucks. 1967)

(5) The following extract from a press statement was released in November 1969 when I was in Washington, D.C.:-

> "MULTI-MILLION GIFT TO INITIAL TEACHING ALPHABET: An American has left the income from his over 6 million estate to further the success of the Initial Teaching Alphabet, it was announced to-day by Professor J. R. Block, Director of the i.t.a. Foundation. The Initial Teaching Alphabet is the well-known 44-character "rationalized" alphabet designed to make learning to read easier.
>
> "The gift came from Mr. Eugene Kelly, who, before his retirement, was President of Coca Cola of Canada.
>
> "'It is extremely gratifying to me,' said Sir James Pitman, at a dinner given him by the Academy for Educational Development at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Douglass Cater, in Washington, D.C., 'that a philanthropist such as Mr. Kelly had the foresight to leave such substantial resources to a cause which is so intimately related to the growth of men's minds. Only a literate man can realize his full potentiality, and I believe that the Initial Teaching Alphabet is an extraordinarily potent weapon in the war on ignorance everywhere'."

(6) There were only 20 schools which could be persuaded ;in 1961 to supersede T.O. by i.t.a. in the early teaching of reading. Since then the growth in the field of teaching of reading and writing [see, for instance, Note (1)] has been phenomenal in the history of educational innovation.

(7) Extracts from the Congressional Record are here available: also one copy of the full volume.

(8) I have available copies of the official report of my evidence in the House of Commons to the Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on Education and Science, to send to those who may ask - and a small supply here. It is also relevant to development 8.